

TOWARDS A PSYCHOLOGY OF MEDIA EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This study will introduce some of the fundamentals and rationale for the Psychology of Media Education based on Developmental Psychology. It is an important area of study of a modern teacher profession and teacher education and a new field of multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinary knowledge and research. The authors argue without a doubt that the different symbol- or media environments are influencing young children, adolescents and adults in their everyday life. The study even speak about media(ted) cultures based on media environments including traditional printed media, audio-visual media, interactive computer media and the rapidly growing phenomena like mobile communication, CMMC (computer mediated multimedia communications), web-communities, networked games and virtual reality communities. The significance and influence of media environments need to be publicly recognised in educational contexts of children and adolescents too.

Keywords: *Developmental Psychology, Model, Media Education.*

INTRODUCTION

Modern societies are undergoing drastic social, informational, and technological changes. It is generally acknowledged that the current developments of symbol environments based on information and communication technologies (ICT) restructure the world and predetermine the advent of the information and communication society. Those new developments shape also the ways how we act and how our children grow and develop their skills, identity and personality. The media has become one of the important parts of our everyday environments and the development and identity building environments of our children (Jordan, 2004; Bandura, 1997).

The revolutionary advances in the technologies and globalization are transforming the nature, speed, and loci of human influence. These rapidly evolving realities place increasing demands on the personal and collective agency to shape personal destinies and national cultures as well as on the life of societies. In order to develop intellectually, emotionally, socially and morally a human being, whether child or adult, requires the same thing: active participation in progressively more complex,

reciprocal interaction with other persons and environments; with objects, and symbol environments in the individual's immediate and mediated environment. To be effective, the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time. In our modern world the different kinds of media environments have quite rapidly filled those environments, in which we and our children and adolescents interact. Our immediate environments are in many cases so filled with different media and mediated interactions that their influence may not be neglected (Bandura, 1997; Bronfenbrenner, 1999; Mustonen & Pulkkinen, 2003; Jordan, 2004).

1. Developmental psychology

The developmental psychology is the ecological model of media environments. The well known Bronfenbrenner's (1988; 1977; 1979; 1999) ecological or bio (socio) ecological model (with the addition of the ontogenetic level by Belsky, 1980) of human development has been one of the promising instruments from a systemic perspective which has been used in many areas of the psychological research of child and adolescent development, as well as in mental health care services.

According to it, we should research the multiplicity of different media influences on different levels of human development, daily life and cultures. The biological, emotional, inter-personal, social and cultural levels mutually influence the development of children and adolescent in different ways (Jordan, 2004; Dalton, Adachi-Mejia, et al. 2006; Thakkar, Garrison, & Christakis, 2006).

Jordan (2004) states curiously, "neither Bronfenbrenner nor the scholars who have worked within this paradigm write much about the role of media in these systems; perhaps because the research tradition focuses on relationships between human beings"(p. 197). The authors argue that the media, media environments and the mediated communications in children's and adolescents' lives must be well recognized, because of the critical role they play in shaping the contexts of their childhood and adolescent life.

The Bronfenbrenner model is traditionally represented as four expanding circles: the macro, the exo-level, the meso-level and the micro-level. Belsky (1980) added one level to this system, the first level - the ontogenetic level, meaning genetic and personal factors within the person which contributes to the development and adaptation. In the ecological model of media environments the macrosystem level includes global, social, commercial and political influences of media, as well as cultural beliefs and habits, that have more and more effect on our children in modern societies. It includes the broader (media) cultural context like ethnicity, historical setting that shapes attitudes, beliefs and behaviors.

The effects of globalisation and the effects of global commercial culture, mediaculture and 'culture capitalism', as well as the global level educational forces might be considered at this level. The exosystem in the ecological model of media environments includes the aspects of communities and national, commercial and ethnic cultures, and media culture. As a part of the ecological model it provides the powerful media relations. Exosystems may be seen as the social settings that influence a child's development as Bandura (1997) proposes, where the child does not necessarily have a

direct role. For example, a parents workplace, models and identities seen in the media-environments belong to this level.

The meso-system reflects the interconnections between the mediated and non-mediated stranger and weaker ties (Haythornthwaite, 2002). Meso-systems contains the relationships or intersections between microsystems, such as the congruence of family orientations and peer orientations. At this level, the interaction also happens with the different components of the exosystem. A good example is how an individual belongs to and interacts with different cultural groups, values and activities offered by and in the media, as well as in the physical environments. The schools, day-care and work environments, as well as peer groups, in many cases belong to this level (Jordan, 2004).

The microsystem level is traditionally seen as the family, peers, teachers and other people having strong ties with. The child's day-to-day setting, the places they inhabit, the people they live with, the things they do together, close peer groups, and friends belonging to this level are the parts of this system. At this level we see the mediated and non-mediated interaction between the family members and other close peers. We have also been influenced by the modern media and mediated ways of communication (Jordan, 2004; Mustonen & Pulkkinen, 2003).

Finally, the ontogenetic level means that each individual has an impact both on his environment and on his own genetic tendencies for development. Ontogenesis is defined as the development of the self through self-regulation, which means that development is more than the result of the interaction between nature and nurture, more than the sum of environment and genetic disposition, and it will remain as a mystery to some extent. This model is also transactional, which implies that not only the child is influenced by his environment, but also the environment is affected by the characteristics of the child.

2. Psychology of Media Education

Through this kind of ecological model, developmental psychology is the integrative discipline which is best suited

to advance the understanding of human adaptation and change, especially in the Digital Era. It is the discipline that uniquely encompasses the complex interplay between developmental, intra-personal, biological, inter-personal, and socio-structural determinants of human functioning.

This conceptual study will introduce some of the fundamentals and rationale for the Psychology of Media Education, as one important area of studies of a modern teacher profession and teacher education. It is a field of multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinary knowledge and research. From this viewpoint, the Psychology of Media Education should be incorporated into the basic and further training of primary and pre-primary school teachers.

Without doubt, the different media and symbol or media environments are nowadays influencing our and our children's and adolescent's everyday life in many ways (Bandura, 1997; Jordan, 2004). We could even talk about media(ted) cultures and developmental contexts based on media environments including traditional printed media (posters, magazines), audio-visual media (TV, films, videos, DVDs), interactive computer media (computer games and Internet), as well as the rapidly growing phenomena like the different mediated and mobile ways of communication (mobile phones), CMC (computer mediated communications), Web-communities, networked games and virtual reality communities (Jordan, 2004; Thakkar, Morrison & Christakis, 2006).

Luskin (2003) argues that today's educational institutions need faculty and staff who understand the higher concepts in media arts and sciences. Our new tools are both physical and intellectual, with an understanding of psychology being central to the most effective use of new media in society. Individuals must understand the implications of media to perform competitively in the majority of new and emerging occupational specialties. The study of media relations and effects in the ecological model of media environments and understanding the psychology of media are fundamental to emerging trends.

2.1 Questions on the psychology of media education

The Psychology of Media Education as stated is a multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinary area of research and knowledge and it is trying to answer these most important questions:

- How do people behave, relate, entertain, study and learn in digital media?
- What is the instructor's ability, as a person, to promote democratic, inter-cultural, communicative and action-oriented learning?
- What are the psychological fundamental media mechanisms at different levels of observations?
- What are the dark and bright sides of different digital media and their powers?
- What are the psychological, social and sociological media effects and affordances?
- Can we use digital technology for positive psychology purposes: to enhance psycho-social and emotional intelligence and well-being?
- Can we use digital technology to prevent and cope with social and mental health problems?
- Can we implement digital technology in education and training to explore and study crucial psychological mechanisms?
- Can we make new technologies more effective and human-centred?
- Can we develop different media standards, for example from developmental and educational viewpoints?
- In which ways can we improve media self-regulation, self-efficacy and self-criticism toward media among children and adolescents?

Psychology of Media Education is a theoretically and empirically oriented research area at the intersection of psychology, development, learning, education and media. This study focuses mainly on: psychology of media, educational and developmental psychology, and educational sciences. Sociopsychological antecedents and consequences as well as the educational and developmental influences of mass

media, especially television, computer networks and the Internet, are also of great interest. Nearly all aspects of social science have relevance to media studies, especially cognitive science and psychology (developmental psychology, social psychology and educational psychology) (see Figure 1).

The new Psychology of Media Education includes the study of how the individual develops, interacts, and builds his or her identity with the multiplicity of sensory stimuli and with the complex information. It tries to understand the perceptions, emotions, beliefs and behaviours. This comprehension is in addition to, and synergistic with, the theories of intelligence, learning, communication, cognition and emotion.

The psychological understanding of some of the fundamental media mechanisms from the developmental and educational viewpoints are more important for the educator's profession. The emotional power of drama, multimodality, immersion and interactivity, and as well as the positive effects of multimedia, digital 'mental tools' and networked learning environments for learning, pro-social behaviours and school achievement or leisure time for entertainment and relaxing are from those starting points essential for the understanding, of any of the educators of our time.

It is also very important to understand some potential threats, possibilities for negative physical health influences such as disordered body images and eating habits, antisocial behaviour, and as well as mental health

influences such as traumatising, desensitising and negative social learning models for children watching or using some highly emotionally violent or otherwise harmful media. Other important issues to be considered are for example; searching the possibilities for psychosocial regulation in mediated communications and possibilities and threats it provides for social communications, networks and activities, as well as for the identity of children and adolescents (Jordan, 2004; Bandura, 1997).

The Psychology of Media Education as a multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary area of research is trying to answer those questions. It provides the knowledge and understanding which could link together the educational sciences, computer science, educational, social and developmental psychology, psychological research of media and other relevant sources of knowledge from other disciplines. Together, they are building a cross-curricular subject of study.

The Psychology of Media Education provides psychological understanding of the research of media mechanisms and mediated communications from the developmental and educational viewpoints. It is seeking for those critical ways which shape children's contexts and are shaped by their media environments and media use (Jordan, 2004). It offers intellectual tools for both educator or educational scientist to understand and develop educational media literacy and awareness of psychological influences of media, as well as it helps to utilise the benefits of media in such a way as the power of hypermedia and CMC from psychological viewpoints in their educational contexts.

Teaching, studying and learning in media environments and through mediated communication is a good illustration of the multiple levels in which child development is embedded, and is the impact of Internet contents and connections, as well as the various media television programs, movies, video games, and popular music. In terms of the biological model, traditional media are situated in the exosystem, but they are subject to influences from the chronosystem; from the macrosystem (including cultural values and government policies), from other elements in the exosystem (such as economic

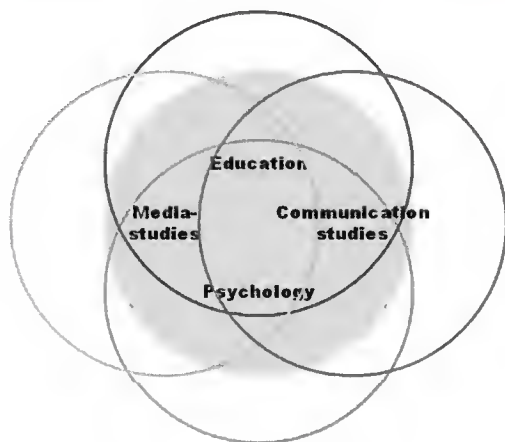


Figure 1. The central core subjects of Psychology of Media Education

pressure) and from the microsystem (such as parental monitoring) (Jardan, 2004).

All these factors have a role each time when children and adolescents tune in or boot up. The daily environment of children and adolescents in most of the American and European countries are media saturated. A national survey (USA) of households with children between the ages of 2 and 17 revealed that virtually all had one or more television sets, 97% had a VCR, and 78% subscribed to cable television.

With respect to interactive media, 70% of the homes had at least one computer, 68% had video games, and 52% had Internet access (Woodard & Gridina, 2000). One growing tendency is e.g. the increasing time spent with computers compared to TV watching. In addition, many of them have television sets and computers in their rooms. With all these media devices available, most of the children and adolescents spend more time involved with media entertainment than they do in any other activity. Even very young children are active participants in this media immersion: children of 6 and younger devote more time to entertainment media than to reading, being read to, or playing outside (Rideout et al., 2003). Which purposes do children and adolescents use for new technologies for and what is the impact of spending so much time with these new technologies?

With respect to computers, many believe that they are an important educational resource for children, especially for doing their homework. There has been relatively little research on whether home computer use improves school achievement and the results of several studies suggest that it may very well be helpful (Subrahmanyam, Kraut, Greenfield, & Gross, 2000; Jackson, Von Eye, Biacca, Barbatsis, Zhaa & Fitzgerald, 2006). Participation in Internet chat rooms may provide adolescents social support, empowerment with useful information, for example, about health and sexuality. There is even evidence that some kinds of video games may have specific cognitive benefits (Green & Bavelier, 2003). Game-Based Learning is also a research area which seems to be quite promising from both cognitive and

emotional outputs, as well as from the motivational viewpoint (Prensky, 2001).

A great deal of public attention has focused on children's and adolescent's deep involvement with different media. In recent years, most part of online activities of adolescent boys and girls has become more and more similar rather than different. For example, their online social interaction as occurring in private settings (micro level strong ties) such as e-mail and instant messages and, secondly, happening with friends who are also part of their daily offline lives, and thirdly devoted to fairly ordinary yet intimate topics (e.g., friends, gossip).

According to Siegler (2006), the most effective weapon against the various negative effects of media on children operating at the microsystem level is with parents exercising their and their children's understanding of media related issues and media safety principles, as well as it includes some amount of control over their children's access to undesirable media (Schooler, Kim, & Sorsoli, 2006), and at the macrosystem level, with legal controls and government programs designed to minimize the negative features of the media in which children interact with. Effective control is a very complicated and hard issue, however, because of the free speech concerns and the global nature of the problem.

Both positive and negative impacts can be partly expected to happen through differential use and impact of media on different observational levels. Strong micro level ties may be seen to affect positively by providing new means of communication when that medium provides further means and opportunities for contact, and acts as a complement to existing communications methods. Weaker ties at meso-, exo- and macro levels may also be affected positively when the medium expands the possibilities for initiating and maintaining feedback and ties, providing a means through which previously unconnected individuals can now initiate contact, such as new online friendships.

These days one of the important questions and 'the bright side' is how to implement media to enhance emotional intelligence and develop social and emotional skills.

Positive Psychology Prevention Programs use all the benefits of digital progress in order to accomplish their goals. Although some benefits clearly accrue from children's and adolescents' experience with media, the extensive amount of their media exposure has aroused many concerns.

Conclusion

We state that Bronfenbrenner's developmental psychology model together with Belsky's (1980) addition, the ontogenetic level, has made an important contribution to our thinking about development and media. His emphasis on the broad context of development and the many different interactions among factors at various levels has highlighted how complex the development of every child and adolescent is.

To summarize, Psychology of Media Education is concerned with a wide swath of human behaviour, especially in an increasingly media dominated society. It explores the media as they exert influence on social, educational and strategic communications, on our everyday life, on physical and psychological well being. The Psychology of Media Education and the ecological model of media environments are some of the starting points in building a core discipline for the research and understanding of these effects. Media technology, embodied in the celestial eyes or global cameras, provides a witness to our private thoughts and public farays. In the beginning there was the word. In the beginning there was the image. And in the beginning there was the voice. Psychology of Media Education is about this trilogy. It especially concentrates on developmental, educational and learning related issues. It is about all that is human and all that is of interest to humans.

The media is devoutly a reflection of its creators, in all their mediated reflection, incarnation, aspiration and rumination. To study this remarkable panoply is to study the creators and their creations. According to Fischhoff (2005) to study the Psychology of Media Education means "in the final scene, to study how humans represent

themselves to themselves through lenses, through harmonics and through spectra and how humans send these self-images across time and space in a fierce proclamation of existence.

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